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❀ 6 ❀

THE FOUNDATION OF HAMSHEN AND ARMENIAN DESCENT MYTHS: PARALLELS AND INTERCONNECTIONS

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According to tradition, the Armenian community of Hamshen was founded by two nobles (*nakharar*s) of the Amatuni family, Shapuh and his son Hamam. The *History* written by the learned clergyman, Ghevond (Leontius) *vardapet,* relates that they led a part of their people into the territory of the Byzantine Empire, near the Georgian frontier, to escape Arab oppression. The emperor, whose name is given as Constantine, subsequently welcomed Shapuh, Hamam, and the several other noblemen with honors, and accorded to the lower orders of the population good and fertile land on which to settle. The entirety of Ghevond's account of the actual migration and settlement is unfortunately brief:

> Left without property and food, naked and barefoot, [the inhabitants of Armenia] were exposed to the horrors of famine. They left their country and fled to the Greek territory to seek refuge. The mass of the population, over twelve thousand men, women, and children, as we were told, migrated from their land under the leadership of Shapuh from the house of Amatunik', Hamam his son, and other Armenian nobles with their cavalry. The lawless and brutal enemy then persecuted the fugitives with the help of his troops and reached the districts of Kol, near the Georgian frontier, where a battle took place. Some of the enemy troops perished and others fled, while [the emigrants] crossed the river Akampsis.
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> The sources of this river are found in the province of Tayk' and it flows in a northwesterly direction, irrigating the country of Eger and ultimately flowing into the Pontus (Sea). As they crossed the river, the Greek emperor Constantine (VI) was immediately notified [about their arrival]. He called them unto him and gave the nobles and their

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> cavalry high honors. [The emperor] accommodated the bulk of the lower class people on good fertile lands. The other half of the population [of Armenia], on the other hand, remained there in the servitude of [the Arabs] and lived in extreme poverty; they were either woodcutters or water-carriers like the Gebeonites.[1]

The date of these events is almost certainly circa 790. This date is suggested first of all by the names that Ghevond gives for the Caliph (Harun al-Rashid, 786-809) and for his brother the *ostikan* or governor ('Ubaid-ullah, 788-90), as well as the brother's appointee as co-governor (Suleiman), who were responsible for the oppression. Ghevond follows his account of the emigration with a couple of instances of Arab spoliation of the Armenian Church following the death, "in those days," of the Catholicos Isaiah (788) and the accession of his successor Stepanos (788-90).[2] This allows Zaven Arzoumanian, Ghevond's English translator, to date the exodus to 789-90.[3] Peter Charanis had deduced the date of "about 790,"[4] and Joseph Laurent, 791.[5]

The Date of the Migration

The dating of these events to around 790 is crucial to the final conclusion of this chapter. But the date as implied by Ghevond's account is not itself indisputable. A different version of events is given by the eleventh-century Stepanos Asoghik of Taron. The reliability of Ghevond must therefore be examined. The *History* contains no information about its author other than that supplied by the copyist who worked some time between 1279 and 1311. This copyist placed his colophon, with which the text (as it has survived) ends and in which he

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[1] Ghevond, *Patmutiun* [History], ed. Karapet Eziants (St. Petersburg: I.N. Skorokhodov, 1887). I have not been able to locate and consult this edition and therefore cite the chapter numbers as used by Zaven Arzoumanian in his translation, *History of Lewond, The Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians* (Wynnewood, PA: St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Church, 1982), ch. 42, p. 149.

[2] Ibid. chs. 41-42, pp. 147-50.

[3] Ibid., p. 195, notes to ch. 42.

[4] Peter Charanis, "The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire," *Byzantinoslavica* 22 (1961): 196-240 (reprinted as Study VI of Peter Charanis, *Studies on the Demography of the Byzantine Empire* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1972), p. 2.

[5] Joseph Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam depuis la Conquête Arabe jusqu'en 886* (Paris: Fontemoing [E. de Boccard], 1919), pp. 184n4, 193n2, 194n9.

identifies himself, immediately after the accession of Catholicos Stepanos in 788. He also names Ghevond's patron as one Shapuh Bagratuni.[6] The natural inferences to be drawn from the colophon are first that it was shortly after 788 that Ghevond, a contemporary or so he claims,[7] of recent events, had composed or finished his work, and second, that he had written it for the Shapuh Bagratuni (died 824), who was the son of one presiding prince of Armenia (Smbat, 761-75) and brother of another (Ashot, 806-26).[8] It has generally been agreed that the text has not survived in its "original" state, since it seems that the initial chapters are missing, but that a late-eighth-century date for the composition of the text is correct. Stephen Gero has argued, however, that the extant version, although incorporating—with extensive remodeling—an earlier version, was in fact written much later, namely after the eleventh-century *History* of Stepanos Asoghik and in part based upon it.[9]

Asoghik's account of the Amatuni migration and the subsequent Arab spoliation of the Church does indeed read very much like Ghevond's, but there is a crucial difference in what precedes it. In Asoghik's text, as in Ghevond's, the exodus is followed by the death of Catholicos Isaiah, preceding the accession of Stepanos, and it follows oppression, from which the migrants flee. But in Asoghik's text the oppression that led to the migration occurred not in the 780s, but in the early 750s, the work of the Caliph Abul Abbas (750-54) and his brother rather than the responsibility of Harun al-Rashid and his brother.[10] Ghevond's *History* records this oppression of the 750s as well as that of the late 780s and describes them in very similar terms.[11] Asoghik's description of the miseries of the 750s is much the same as Ghevond's. There are three possible explanations for the discrepancy

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[6] Ghevond, *History*, "Colophon" = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, p. 150.

[7] Ghevond, *History*, ch. 34 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, p. 137.

[8] Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, p. 196n3.

[9] Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1973), pp. 137, 140.

[10] Stepanos Asoghik of Taron, *Patmutiun Tiezerakan* [Universal History], ed. Stepan Malkhasiants (St. Petersburg: I.N. Skorokhodov, 1885); French trans. of part I by Edouard Dulaurier, *Histoire Universelle par Etienne Açoghʿig de Daron, Première partie* (Paris: Ecole Spéciale des Langues Orientales Vivantes, 1883), Bk II, ch. 4, pp. 161-62.

[11] Ghevond, *History*, chs. 28, 41 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, pp. 122-23, 147-48.

between the two accounts regarding the date of the migration to Hamshen. One is that Ghevond, using Asoghik as his source, for some reason duplicated Asoghik's single account of one episode of oppression to make two. A second possibility is that Asoghik, using Ghevond as a source for eighth-century history, had a version of the *History* that lacked the lengthy section that covers the period from 755 to 788. A third is that Asoghik simply failed, by mistake or by design, to summarize this section.

This conundrum seems to have attracted little if any attention from scholars.[12] René Grousset, in his *Histoire de l'Arménie*, followed both Asoghik and Ghevond, in that he recounted the same migration twice, once as an event in the 750s and again as one in 791, apparently without noticing (he certainly makes no comment about the duplication or the discrepancy between the sources).[13] His response cannot therefore be regarded as representing a considered case for one date or the other. It is quite easy to imagine how "Ghevond," if he was indeed writing not in the late eighth century, but much later, could have misdated the episode, in view of another chronological discrepancy regarding another dramatic tale, that of the spoliation, with carnage, of the Monastery of Saint Gregory (Surb Grigor Lusavorich). Ghevond dates this calamity to the turn of the eighth century, that is, about a century earlier than dated by the early-tenth-century historian Hovhannes Catholicos.[14] Jean-Pierre Mahé has suggested that the memory of this event may have derived from oral tradition, in which time and place were vague, thereby requiring an author to undertake the task of locating it chronologically.[15] The same could apply to the Amatuni migration.

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[12] This fact has been pointed out by Hovann Simonian.

[13] René Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie* (Paris: Payot, 1947; reprinted, 1973), p. 320 (citing Asoghik), 338 (citing Ghevond, Asoghik, and Laurent).

[14] Ghevond, *History*, ch. 7 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, pp. 57-58. Hovhannes Catholicos, *Patmutiun Hayots* [History of the Armenians], ed. Nikolai Osipovich [Mkrtich] Emin (Moscow, 1853; reprinted, Tiflis: N. Aghaniants, 1912, and in Classical Armenian Text Reprint Series, ed. John Greppin [Delmar, New York, 1980]), p. 61 (this edition does not divide the text into chapters); *Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i. History of Armenia*, trans. Krikor H. Maksoudian (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), ch. 24, sections 1-9, pp. 114-15.

[15] Jean-Pierre Mahé, "Le problème de l'authenticité et de la valeur de la chronique de Łewond," in *L'Arménie et Byzance: Histoire et Culture* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), pp. 119-26 (pp. 122-23 for the story of the Monastery of Saint Gregory).

There is no enlightenment about the date of the migration to be gained from a consideration of any other sources. The *History of Taron* attributed to Hovhannes Mamikonian, which is, as Levon Avdoyan has shown, a late-tenth-century composition,[16] includes a story which Robert Edwards regards as a tale concerning the second generation of the Amatuni settlement. In this account, a prince called Hamam is attacked by the prince of Georgia, as punishment for Hamam's warning another prince, who was an ally of the Byzantine emperor, against the Georgian prince. The author records that Hamam's city, Tambur, was struck with sword and fire but that Hamam rebuilt it and then called it Hamamashen, after himself:

> . . . [the Persian king] Xosrov . . . adopted Tiran and made him *marzpan* of Armenia. [Tiran] took many troops and went against the Greeks, as if in battle, but he sent [a message] to the emperor:
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> "Do not be afraid. . . ." Then [Heraclius] concluded a treaty of friendship with him . . . . When Vašdean, prince of Georgia, learned of this, he sent [word] to Xosrov that "Tiran has deceived you . . . send eight thousand men and horses . . . and I shall deliver [Tiran] into your hands."
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> Then the king . . . sent an army of five thousand to Vašdean.
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> Now Vašdean had written a letter to Tiran: ". . . come, let us plan something together against the king [of Persia]." After [Tiran] had received the letter and read it, there came on that same day a letter from Hamam, the son of Vašdean's sister, which revealed the deceit among the troops coming from Persia. And [Tiran] immediately wrote a letter to Vašdean putting him to shame on account of these secretive affairs.
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> And the enraged Vašdean had Hamam fetched and his hands and feet cut off. And he took the Persian [soldiers], passed along the Čorox [Chorokh] River, and went into Hamam's *k'ałak'*, which is called Tambur, which [Vašdean] struck both with the sword and with fire and he enslaved the *k'ałak'*"s [inhabitants].
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> Now the holy bishop of the *k'ałak'*, Manknos, vehemently cursed the prince. And [Vašdean] ordered the Persians to slaughter the priests in the church which was called Holy Siovn. The bishop then silently prayed to God . . . [Vašdean's men] sacrificed [him] on the day of Pentecost . . . .

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[16] Hovhannes Mamikonian, *Patmutiun Taronoy* [The History of Taron], ed. Ashot Abrahamyan (Erevan: Matenadaran, 1941); trans. and comm. Levon Avdoyan, *Pseudo-Yovhannēs Mamikonean. The History of Tarōn [Patmutʿiwn Tarōnoy]* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), esp. pp. 25-48 for the dating. I have been unable to consult the Armenian edition and cite hereafter only the translation.

> And two days later clouds from heaven burst, and consumed [Vašdean] in fire while he was sitting at the gate of the *k'ałak'* of Tambur. After this Hamam built it again and called it by his own name, Hamamašēn. . . .
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> Then in this year Heraclius went out and killed Xosrov.[17]

This story suggests to Edwards that the Byzantine emperor had not enjoyed an undisputed right to the lands that he had granted to the Amatunis and that the Georgians subsequently tried to reassert a claim to them, their attempt being remembered, in a garbled form, in the tale of Prince Hamam.[18] Even if this interpretation is correct, however, it reveals nothing about the date of the migration. The whole story of Hamam is set in the seventh century, at the time of the emperor Heraclius (610-41), eight years before even the beginnings of Arab expansion, and long before the time of Arab rule over Armenia.

The dating of the Amatuni migration to the late eighth century depends entirely on acceptance that Ghevond's *History* is indeed a contemporary work. The main problem about the acceptance of an eighth-century date, in general, is the exchange of letters that the text contains, purportedly between the Caliph Umar II (712-20) and the Byzantine emperor Leo III (717-41). This section and its problems do not, however, necessarily seem to affect the authenticity of the rest of the work. Since there is within the rest some internal evidence for a late-eighth-century date and none for a later one, it is reasonable to accept its authenticity, as Mahé has argued, even though it cannot be proved by reference to other evidence.[19]

The Number of the Migrants

It was thus around 790 that Shapuh and Hamam Amatuni are believed to have led some other nakharars, their cavalry, and a mass of people from misery and oppression to a new land. Ghevond wrote that he had heard that more than 12,000 people went. It is not clear whether by 12,000 Ghevond meant 12,000 men plus their women and children, as

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[17] Avdoyan, *Pseudo-Yovhannēs*, pp. 159-60.

[18] Robert W. Edwards, "Hamšēn: An Armenian Enclave in the Byzanto-Georgian Pontos. A Survey of Literary and Nonliterary Sources," *Le Muséon* 101 (1988): 403-22 (405-06 for this story).

[19] Mahé, "Le problème," esp. pp. 120, 124-25, for the correspondence.

his French translator, Garabed Chahnazarian, has it, or 12,000 in total, as Arzoumanian's English translation suggests.[20] The accuracy or inaccuracy of Ghevond's number is not a concern here. The existence and reliability of various accounting methods, from the "primitive," such as requiring everyone to deposit a pebble and then requiring someone to count the pebbles, to the more sophisticated, like the census and the records that lay behind the taxation demands of the Abbasid caliphs and their governors which Ghevond complains about, will not be explored.[21] Nor will the statistics in the famous Armenian *Military List* that was composed at some date between the mid-sixth and mid-seventh century be utilized. That source records conditions from the period of the Arshakuni/Arsacid kingdom, that is, from the first century to the fifth century A.D., and lists the number of cavalry each nakharar family or "prince" was apparently meant to make available to the king.[22]

What is important is that Ghevond is asserting that the migrants constituted a large group of people. Twelve thousand is not, after all, a small number in comparison with either the 120,000 that the *Military List* says was the total of the Armenian cavalry in the Arshakuni period or the 14,000 that was the number of the men of Vaspurakan who, in the early eleventh century, migrated with their king to Byzantium as part of the famous Byzantine annexations of the Armenian realms.[23] The French and English translators of Ghevond differ slightly in their rendering, but according to the latter, Ghevond terms the migrants "the mass of the population," and the people who stayed in Armenia "the other half of the population."[24] The French translation is less mathe-

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[20] Garabed V. Chahnazarian, *Histoire des guerres et des conquêtes des Arabes en Arménie, par l'éminent Ghévond, Vartabed arménien* (Paris: Benjamin Duprat, 1856), p. 162; Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, p. 149.

[21] Ghevond, *History,* chs. 28, 41 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, pp. 122-23, 148.

[22] For discussion of the contents and dating, see Nicholas Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian: The Political Conditions Based on the Naxarar System,* trans. and comm. Nina G. Garsoïan (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1970), pp. 193-98, 206-10, 218-24, 232-34; Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 1963), pp. 135-36, 229-41.

[23] Tovma Artsruni, *Patmutiun Tann Artsruniats* [History of the House of the Artsrunis], ed. Kerovbe Patkanian (St. Petersburg: I.N. Skorokhodov, 1887), Continuator Bk IV, ch. 12; trans. and comm. Robert W. Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni, History of the House of the Artsrunik'* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), pp. 370-71.

[24] Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, p. 149.

matically precise,[25] but both versions show that Ghevond's words imply that in making these remarks he had in mind the population of Armenia as a whole and not simply that of the Amatuni domains.

Although the statistical accuracy of the number that Ghevond states is of no importance in the argument of this chapter, in another respect this number is crucial and very revealing. It is not a random number, because it has a major symbolic importance. The number 12,000 was of great significance in God's ordering of the world in the Bible as a whole and in His ordering of history in the Old Testament in particular. Its application by a medieval author to recent events is a device that enables such a writer to assert that these events are important in God's plan, and perhaps something even more precise than this. Robert Thomson has summarized what early Armenian writers say about number symbolism. Regarding the number twelve they point, among other things, to the twelve hours each of the day and night, the twelve baskets in Christ's feeding of the 5,000, the twelve apostles in the New Testament; the twelve stones of the temple, and various other groups of twelve in the Old Testament.[26]

The most important of such groups is the twelve tribes of Israel. In the New Testament, The Revelation of St. John the Divine records that Saint John, in his vision of the end of the world, "heard the number" of the foreheads of the servants of God "which were sealed." The text lists 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes and states that those who lacked the seal were given up to torment by locusts. Subsequently, it records that the Heavenly City, the Holy Jerusalem, has twelve gates, with twelve angels at the gates, and the names of the twelve tribes written on them; that it is square, measuring 12,000 by 12,000 furlongs, with a wall with twelve foundations; that it is 144 (that is twelve by twelve) cubits high, the height of the city being equal to the length and breadth. The inhabitants of the city are implied to be the 144,000 persons whom Saint John apparently saw with the Lamb on Mount Sion, the redeemed, with His Father's name written on their foreheads.[27] It is

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[25] Chahnazarian, *Histoire*, p. 162, "Quant au reste des habitants qui demeurèrent en Arménie."

[26] Robert W. Thomson, "Number Symbolism and Patristic Exegesis in Some Early Armenian Writers," *Handes Amsorya* 90 (1976): cols. 117-38 (132-33 for the number twelve).

[27] Revelation, ch. 7, verses 4-8; ch. 9, verses 1-11; ch. 21, verses 10-17; ch. 14, verses 1-4; biblical references are to the King James English translation.

not explicitly stated, though it is implied, that some people of each tribe were not marked as servants of God. It is not clear exactly what number of people the author of Revelation envisaged as comprising each of the tribes of the children of Israel. Yet 12,000 is implied to constitute as well as to represent a tribe. Likewise in the Old Testament, The Book of Joshua states that when Joshua conquered and destroyed the men of Ai, "all that fell . . . , both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai."[28] The Book of Numbers records that after the Lord told Moses to avenge the children of Israel, Moses told them to arm some of themselves, "of every tribe a thousand," and "so there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel . . . twelve thousand armed for war."[29]

The number 12,000, therefore, has connotations both of constituting a people and of being a (larger) people's defenders and also of being chosen by God or by His agents and of being saved. Christian writers everywhere were impressed by number symbolism and commonly attempted to connect their own subject matter to biblical references in order to give it meaning. The Armenian historian Bishop Sebeos, who wrote, perhaps but not for certain, in the second half of the seventh century, did this in his account of Jewish participation in the origins of Islam and the rise of the Arabs to the status of a world power.[30] Sebeos states that the twelve tribes of the Jews went to Arabia from Edessa, and their 12,000 were there divided, 1,000 per tribe, to guide the Ar-

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[28] The Book of Joshua, ch. 8, verse 25.

[29] Numbers, ch. 31, verses 1-5.

[30] The text which has traditionally, since 1837, been regarded as the *History of Heraclius* by Bishop Sebeos is most probably not that work. The surviving text is generally regarded as having been compiled, or finished, not very long after 661 (since it ends with an account of the Arab civil war of 656-61), using earlier compositions as sources. It is, however, possible that the compilation was done later still, in the eighth century.

The text is translated and discussed in Robert W. Thomson and James Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, 2 vols. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999). In part I, pp. xxxi-xxxix, Thomson surveys the issues of attribution, authorship, and date but does not explicitly consider an eighth-century date, for which see Anne E. Redgate, *The Armenians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 189-90. Timothy W. Greenwood, "Sasanian Echoes and Apocalyptic Expectations: A Reevaluation of the Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos," *Le Muséon* 115 (2002): 323-97, offers an extensive discussion of the author/compiler's sources but does not consider his date to be a problem, having "no doubt that it was compiled in the mid-seventh century," about 655 with three updates added that bring the coverage to 661, probably by a senior cleric, and for Prince Hamazasp Mamikonian (pp. 334, 389-94).

abs, who themselves were constituted into twelve tribes, to the land of Israel.[31] Likewise, but more strikingly, Nennius, an early-ninth-century British writer, states that the achievements of Saint Patrick, the evangelizer of Ireland, included the following: he preached to foreign nations for forty years; he wrote 365 or more alphabets; he founded 365 churches; he consecrated 365 or more bishops; he baptized on one day seven kings; he made three petitions to God for the Christian Irish; and, in one day, he converted and baptized 12,000 men in a single region, Connacht.[32] The truth of such assertions for their authors is not literal but moral.

Old Testament Parallels

Ghevond's reference to 12,000 was meant as a statement to his audience about the migrants, but this statement was not an assertion regarding how many people an observer could have counted. If the number of migrants really was 12,000, this was a coincidence, perhaps (even probably) a contrived one, but it was not the ultimate cause of this very number being stated in the text. Ghevond offers his audience a further coded message. The people who stayed behind, in servitude to the Arabs and in poverty, "were either woodcutters or water-carriers like the Gebeonites."[33] Again, the literal statement may be disregarded. It is af-

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[31] Sebeos, *Patmutiun Sebeosi* [History of Sebeos], ed. Georg V. Abgaryan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1979), pp. 134-35 (ch. 42); trans. Robert Thomson, in Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, pt. 1, pp. 95-96; French trans. Frédéric Macler, *Histoire d'Héraclius par l'évêque Sébéos* (Paris: Imp. Nationale, 1904), pp. 94-96. Macler's translation explicitly identifies as Israelites the 12,000 who were divided; Thomson's translation states that these 12,000 were divided "like the sons of Israel." Howard-Johnston, *Sebeos,* pt. II, pp. 238-40, regards this Jewish contribution as a spurious account, reaching Sebeos conjoined with authentic material. Robert G. Hoyland gives it more credence and thinks that Sebeos had two reports about Jewish activity which he himself put together. See his chapter, "Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam," in Ronald L. Nettler, ed., *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, in co-operation with the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1995), pp. 89-102.

[32] John Morris, ed. and trans., *Nennius. British History and the Welsh Annals* (London and Chichester: Phillimore, and Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), ch. 54 of *Historia Brittonum* [History of the British], English trans., pp. 34-35; Latin text, p. 75.

[33] Ghevond, *History,* ch. 42 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond,* p. 149.

ter all scarcely possible either that there were no other occupations available or that all practitioners of all other occupations had migrated. It is the comparison that counts. The Old Testament Book of Joshua relates the story of the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites hear that Joshua and the Israelites have destroyed Jericho and Ai, realize that they are likely to be treated similarly, and are afraid. Some of them disguise themselves as ambassadors and travelers and seek Joshua out, pretending to have come from a far country and asking for an agreement "to let them live." Their request is granted. When the Israelites subsequently realize that they have been tricked, they keep to the agreement but Joshua tells the Gibeonites that they will henceforth be bondmen, woodcutters, and water carriers for the congregation and altar of the Lord.[34] The Gibeonites had previously been very powerful and their agreement with the Israelites precipitates an alliance of five kings against them. To meet this, they seek Joshua's help. During the campaign, Joshua works the great miracle of causing sun and moon to stand still at his command while the people take vengeance.[35]

So Ghevond's comparison of the non-migrant Armenians with the Gibeonites is relatively complimentary, and certainly not insulting. The Bible after all implies that the Gibeonites, though wily and enslaved, nevertheless enjoy some favor of the Lord. They are the only people to make peace and survive, whereas the others' hearts are hardened, by the Lord, so that they fight the Israelites and are painfully destroyed.[36] The Lord subsequently inflicts a three-year famine on Israel as punishment for the Israelite King Saul's hostility to the Gibeonites, and King David delivers two sons and five grandsons of Saul to the Gibeonites to be hanged as atonement.[37]

Ghevond and his audience, even the laity, were of course much more familiar with the Bible and with biblical stories than most people today. Unlike some educated scholars in the early twenty-first century, eighth-century clerics would not have had to do any research about the Gibeonites in order to be aware of their story. Nor would their audience have been mystified by the allusion. Ghevond and almost all other early medieval Armenian historians (an exception being Sebeos) wrote for patrons and to advance causes.[38] Certainly they took pains to pre-

[34] Joshua, ch. 9.
[35] Ibid., ch. 10, verses 1-14.
[36] Ibid., ch. 11, verses 19-20.
[37] The Second Book of Samuel (or The Second Book of Kings), ch. 21-22.
[38] Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos,*

sent their patrons and causes in a particular light and to interpret the past in a way that explained and justified their present circumstances and policies and which would inspire right conduct in the future. In so doing, they selected and molded their material, and the very fact that they sought to communicate particular messages reveals that in their works they were not simply reflecting current circumstances and ideas; rather, they were seeking to influence them. Nevertheless, it is not plausible that the authors' mentalities and representations were divorced from the ideas and aspirations of their audience. They drew on memories in their accounts of recent history. They wanted their accounts to be accepted and must have realized that if these accounts were unrecognizable they would not be well received.

Ghevond's representation of eighth-century Armenian politics as involving Christian martyrdom, death for the Christian faith and fighting for it, clerical exhortation and angelic participation must have been both intelligible and credible.[39] His audience will have been cognizant of other Armenian texts that had biblical content and inspiration. It will have been familiar with the religious art of Armenia that, of course, incorporated biblical themes and references. It will have had access to monasteries (for monasteries were not extinct; some of them even flourished in the eighth century),[40] and, at the aristocratic level, to family bishops. It will therefore not have been unlike the contemporary elites in the new warrior kingdoms that were located in territories that had formerly been part of the Roman Empire, for whose states the Old Testament provided a political model and guidance.[41] Such an audience

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pt. 1, pp. xliv-xlvii (Thomson's introduction).

[39] Ghevond, *History,* ch. 34 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond,* pp. 131-32, 136-38.

[40] Redgate, *The Armenians,* pp. 186-88.

[41] Adrian Hastings, "Christianity and Nationhood: Congruity or Antipathy?" *Journal of Religious History* 25:3 (2001): 247-60; idem, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 14, and ch. 8, esp. pp. 195, 198. The attractions for rulers and aristocracies of an Old Testament self-image are shown in John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), chs. 3-6. Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), argues that one of the factors which enabled the Anglo-Saxons to conceive of themselves as a common people was their belief in an ancestral migration (from the Continent to Britain) that they envisaged as a re-enactment of the biblical exodus and which allowed them to see their experiences in Britain as those of a chosen people in a Promised Land, part

would have been alert to the implications of the Armenian "12,000" and of the "Gibeonites." Any member of his audience who appreciated Ghevond's reference to the Gibeonites must have immediately thought of Joshua, to whom the Gibeonites submitted. Joshua, favored by God, was a ruthless destroyer of those who did not submit. It is conceivable that a parallel between Joshua and the Israelites on the one hand and the Arab governor and the Arabs on the other is being implied by the comparison. In eighth-century Armenia, the Arabs were certainly ruthless and might have been perceived as favored by God in that God was allowing them to oppress the Armenians. But it is hard to think that Ghevond meant, and wanted his audience to feel, that the hero Joshua and an Arab Muslim ruler were equivalents; an alternative, more attractive parallel is easily identifiable. In the Old Testament, Joshua is the successor, though not the son, of Moses. After Moses' death, Joshua takes over the leadership of the Israelites, continuing the exodus from servitude in Egypt to the Promised Land, achieving the crossing of the River Jordan and conquering thirty-one kings who stood in the way of their taking over the Promised Land.[42]

It is most likely that Ghevond's audience will have been meant to think that Shapuh Amatuni and his son Hamam were modern Moses and Joshua figures. The fact that Ghevond left this comparison implicit rather than explicit is easily explained: first, because such a comparison would not have been welcomed by his Bagratuni (Bagratid) patrons, since the Bagratunis as non-migrants are implicitly compared with the Gibeonites, and second, because allusion, reliance on the audience to notice references and to meditate on them, seems to have been a common and preferred usage by writers in early medieval Christendom. Two Western analogies illustrate this tendency. The famous Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf,* composed perhaps at about the same time as Ghevond's *History,* was once generally regarded by scholars as an essentially and originally pagan composition, on the grounds of its plot and other superficialities.[43] But it has now been

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of God's plan, and, in some cases, to identify themselves with the Israelites. See also notes 44 and 61 below.

[42] Joshua, ch. 1, 3, 12.

[43] See the translation into modern English by Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf* (London: Faber, 1999). The literature about *Beowulf* is extensive. Suggestions as to its date range from the sixth to the tenth century. For a late-eighth-century date and context, see C. Patrick Wormald, "Bede, Beowulf and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy," in Robert T. Farrell, ed., *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: British

demonstrated to be not only essentially and originally a Christian text but also one that was directed at an audience that had significant knowledge of the Bible.[44] The work of the early-ninth-century British writer Nennius is an important source of evidence about the figure known in later medieval European literature as King Arthur and the vexed question of his historical reality. According to Nicholas Higham, Nennius' account is designed to present Arthur as a British Joshua figure, successor to the British Moses figure who was Saint Patrick. Whereas Nennius explicitly compares Patrick to Moses, he only implicitly compares Arthur to Joshua. Nevertheless an evocation of Joshua is present in the text, deliberate and effective. Nennius draws a parallel between Arthur and Joshua by his use of the number twelve, in his list of Arthur's (twelve) battles, and by his use of a particular phrase in referring to Arthur, *dux bellorum*, meaning leader of battles. This phrase is reminiscent of *dux belli*, leader of battle, which is used in the Vulgate, the Latin version of the Bible, in The Book of Judges where the death of Joshua has left the leadership of the Israelites vacant.[45]

It is more probable than not that Ghevond's perception of parallels between the two Amatuni leaders and Moses and Joshua was not only intelligible to his audience but also fairly widely shared, especially among the Amatunis and the migrants whom they led. It is likely that the leaders, and so perhaps the followers, knew where they were going, that there had been advance negotiations with the Byzantine authorities, and that the travelers therefore had an expectation that the enterprise was practicable. But even if this was the case, and certainly if it

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Archaeological Reports, 1978), pp. 32-95.

[44] Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951). The Old English poem *Exodus* (like *Beowulf* difficult to date) also depends on allusion, though rather differently. Howe, *Migration*, pp. 72-107, shows that the poet identifies the Anglo-Saxons with the Israelites entirely allusively, through his use of language and imagery; essentially Anglo-Saxon sea and sail imagery is applied, and the story of the exodus is limited to the Red Sea crossing.

[45] *History of the British*, chs. 55-56, in Morris, *Nennius*; English trans., p. 35, Latin text, p. 76; The Book of Judges, ch. 1, verse 1 (the phrase is rendered "to fight against them" in the King James English translation). This argument was put forward in Nicholas J. Higham's "Arthur, Joshua and the Israelites: History and Its Purposes in Early Ninth-Century North Wales," unpublished paper delivered to EMERGE (Early Medieval Europe Research Group), Edinburgh, Oct. 22, 2001. See also his *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 136-57, esp. pp. 141-43.

was not, the migrants must have anticipated the possibility of what actually happened, that is, Arab pursuit and the necessity of battle, so their journey must have been both physically challenging and psychologically stressful. It is inconceivable that there was neither need nor occasion for the boosting of morale and confidence. There are three obvious mechanisms, not exclusive of each other, by which this could have been undertaken. One is the production and dissemination of prophesy, perhaps something comparable to the encouragement of the visionary monk who had exhorted the nakharars day after day during the middle stages of the Armenian rebellion against the Arabs in 774-75.[46] Another method is the telling of inspirational tales of ancient heroes, preferably kinsmen of the migrants themselves and of their leaders—perhaps tales comparable to the Mamikonian traditions recorded in the fifth-century Epic Histories (*Buzandaran Patmutiunk)*[47] and the Bagratuni traditions in the surviving *History* that is attributed to Sebeos.[48] Such activity was an important function of minstrels, in Parthian Iran and in many other societies.[49] The reminiscence and underlining of biblical parallels would have been a third method of encouraging fortitude and optimism.

The Historical Context

Both the Amatuni migration and the perception of its leaders as a new Moses and a new Joshua fit easily into the historical context and must have posed a challenge to the aristocratic families, the new Gibeonites, who stayed behind. The eighth century was a period of oppression and decline. Incorporated into an Arab province, with a governor and military garrisons, Armenians suffered heavy and intensified taxation (especially after the Abbasids took over the Caliphate in 750); increasing Arab settlement; invasions by the Khazars from the north; disruption of trade routes; Arab domination of the declining urban life; a diminution in intellectual vivacity and productivity; a near cessation of art and

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[46] Ghevond, *History,* ch. 34 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond,* pp. 131-32.

[47] Nina G. Garsoïan, trans. and comm., *The Epic Histories Attributed to Pʿawstos Buzand, Buzandaran Patmutʿiwnkʿ* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 6-11, 30-35.

[48] Howard-Johnston, in Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Sebeos*, pt. I, pp. lxvii-lxviii.

[49] Mary Boyce, "The Parthian Gōsān and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1957): 10-45.

architecture; and intermittent religious oppression and attempts at forced conversion to Islam. The consequences of these developments were economic decline, depopulation, and poverty, a series of rebellions (the most serious being those of 747-48 and 774-75, both ultimately unsuccessful), heavy casualties, seizure by the Arabs of the estates of rebels and refugees, and westward migration, though, except in the case of the Amatunis, this was an aristocratic rather than a mass phenomenon.[50]

Behind these outcomes lay differences in policy and debates, some of which Ghevond records. There were negotiations with the Byzantine emperor for military aid and for places to settle. Catholicoses in the hope of toleration and peace offered the caliphs submission. A rebellion nearly erupted in 745, fomented by some Bagratunis in collusion with two Mamikonians, Grigor (Gregory) and David, who had been exiled for opposition when the Arabs made Ashot Bagratuni presiding prince over the Armenians in 732.[51] The rebellion that broke out in 747 was led not by this Ashot but by Grigor Mamikonian. Ashot participated reluctantly but then deserted, for which he was blinded.[52] Another Ashot Bagratuni later spoke repeatedly against the 774-75 Mamikonian revolt. His view, "useful advice" according to Ghevond, was disregarded "as words of treason" by the others. This rising began well with the killing of Arab officials, a great victory, the nakharars swearing an oath to live and die together, and with the siege of the city of Karin (Erzerum), but it ended badly, with two disastrous defeats.[53]

Although Ghevond does not report any debate in this particular case, the option of the Amatunis to migrate must nevertheless have been discussed before being undertaken. Behind the decisions of various individuals and groups, to leave or not to leave, must have been reasoning and explanations, not simply bravado or inertia. The departure of 12,000 people reveals a major difference in policy between the

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[50] Redgate, *The Armenians*, pp. 170-73, 188-92, 195-96.

[51] For negotiations with the emperor, see Ghevond, *History*, chs. 8, 26, 29 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, pp. 59-60, 120, 124; for the Catholicos, Ghevond, *History*, ch. 9 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, pp. 62-63; for the events of 745, Ghevond, *History*, ch. 25 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, pp. 117-19, 177n4: for the exile of the Mamikonians, Ghevond, *History*, ch. 21 = Arzoumanian, *The History of Lewond*, pp. 113-14.

[52] Ghevond, *History*, ch. 26 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, pp. 119-21.

[53] Ghevond, *History*, ch. 34 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, pp. 129-33.

leaders of Armenian society which must have involved ideological issues and assertions, claims and counterclaims.

By the last years of the eighth century, the internal power structure both of Armenia (since it now included areas dominated by Arab settlement and power) and of Armenian aristocratic society was very different indeed from what it had been a century earlier.[54] The Mamikonians, previously the most preeminent of the Armenian dynasties, had throughout the century suffered the rivalry of the Bagratunis, and the failure of their rebellions proved to be catastrophic for their fortunes. Politically, they were eclipsed by the end of the century. Others, too, had declined drastically. Cyril Toumanoff estimates that in about 800 A.D. there were only twenty aristocratic "houses" (*tun*; families) left, which could be grouped (since some were offshoots or junior lines of others) into twelve "dynasties," in contrast to the thirty-five princely houses from twenty-two dynasties in around 500 A.D.[55]

In the ninth century, instead of comprising a multiplicity of powerful families, political society was dominated by three or four tuns.. These included the family that held Siunik. There were also the Artsrunis, who in the middle and later parts of the eighth century had been prominent in resisting Arab invasion, two of their leaders being killed in 762 and two more martyred in 786. The Artsrunis had expanded their land holdings, were the only magnates who apparently did not engage in migration, and were perhaps the most powerful and secure family by 800.[56] There were also, of course, the now preeminent Bagratunis. The Bagratunis themselves had split into two branches. A nephew of Ashot the Blind had departed to the borderlands of Klarjk in Iberia (western Georgia), where in the last quarter of the eighth century his family became well entrenched and through marriage to an Iberian princess and acquisition of estates was to replace the reigning dynasty in 813.[57]

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[54] Redgate, *The Armenians,* pp. 175-77, 182.

[55] Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 227-29.

[56] Ghevond, *History*, chs. 30, 40 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, pp. 124-25, 144-47, 194n7; Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 199-200 and notes; Redgate, *The Armenians*, pp. 175, 177-83.

[57] Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, p. 177n4. Robert W. Thomson, trans., intro., comm., *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles: The Original Georgian Text and the Armenian Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 248 and n47.

Political Challenges and Responses: The Use of Descent Myths

By the late eighth century, the old certainties had gone and in a changed political landscape the future must have seemed fraught with questions, especially of where, under whose leadership, and on what foundations Armenian fortunes could or would revive. Those families and their leaders who survived remained capable, retained ambition, and will have felt it necessary to compete for prestige and hence for respect and power. It was traditional in Armenia, as it has been in many other societies, for those aspiring to or exercising leadership to have their ideological stall, as it were, set out in a work of history. Some scholars regard the famous *History of the Armenians* by Movses Khorenatsi as a work of the eighth century rather than the fifth, despite Movses' own claim that he was writing in the fifth century. They assert that one of Khorenatsi's main purposes was to explain, to justify, and hence to ensure the new preeminence of the Bagratunis. He did this by portraying them as having been not only meritorious in the past, consistently loyal to friends and steadfast in religion, but also the most illustrious family in the pre-fifth-century past.[58] The Mamikonians, the family which in reality had enjoyed this position, are effectively written out.

More particularly, Khorenatsi is the first writer to represent the ancient origins of the Bagratunis as Jewish. For him, they were originally a family prominent in Israel, one of whose members was among the people taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and was settled in Armenia at the request of the then Armenian king.[59] It is most

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[58] The crucial reason for rejecting Movses Khorenatsi's assertion about when he wrote is that he seems to have known and used texts that are themselves of a date later than the period which he claimed as his own lifetime. In addition, though less important, some of his interests and attitudes seem anachronistic to a fifth-century date. See Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 330-34; Robert W. Thomson, trans. and comm., *Moses Khorenats'i: History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 1-61 for Khorenatsi as historian (pp. 58-61 for a summary of the dating issue). The traditional fifth-century date is still maintained by a number of scholars and is broadly accepted in Armenia.

[59] Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots* [History of the Armenians], ed. Manuk Abeghian and Set Harutiunian (Tiflis: Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1913); reprinted in Classical Armenian Text Reprint Series, ed. John Greppin (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1981), Bk I, ch. 22; Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i*, pp. 110-11.

likely that the Bagratunis were descended from the ancient Armenian royal Ervandian (Orontid) dynasty, so their asserted Jewish descent was neither a historical discovery nor a memory.[60] Khorenatsi actually explicitly criticizes a view that linked the Bagratunis to the founder of the Armenian race, Hayk, an opinion that is much closer to historical reality than is his own. The Jewish descent of the Bagratunis is an invention, even if it was believed to be true. The Old Testament, as has been noted, had a great appeal in Western Christendom as a political inspiration for the new Germanic kingdoms there, and its appeal was not limited to the West. Throughout Christendom, states and societies developed Old Testament self-images in varying respects, seeing themselves as a new chosen people, enjoying the same close relationship with God—with its perils and its perquisites—that the Israelites had possessed. Eighth-century echoes of this imagining are to be found, for example, in the Byzantine emperor Leo III's iconoclastic policies and in the Western emperor Charlemagne's assuming the nickname of David.[61] To claim biological descent from the Jews was merely to take one step further along a well-trodden path.

This path was not, however, without some disadvantages. In Western societies, the physical presence of Jewish communities was an embarrassing reminder that the Christian claims to be Israelites was, in a literal sense, not true, and this fact contributed to Western anti-Semitic feelings and policies.[62] In Armenia, too, there must have remained Jewish communities, remnants of those that are attested with large numbers in the cities of the fourth century in the *Buzandaran Patmutiunk*.[63]

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[60] Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 201, 306, 320-24.

[61] Redgate, *The Armenians*, pp. 245-46. For iconoclasm, see Peter Brown "A Dark Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *English Historical Review* 88 (1973):1-34. For Old Testament influence and self-image involving war, Byzantium, Spain, and for Frankish parallels, see Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 245-52, 308, 344, 347, 357-58, 385. See Howe, *Migration*, in notes 41 and 44 above, for some Anglo-Saxon parallels.

[62] Their causes are, however, complex. For increasingly hostile Christian attitudes to and treatment of Jews and Judaism in eleventh- and twelfth-century Europe, bedeviled by the claim of the clerks of the Latin Church to be the custodians and interpreters of classical scholarship and of the biblical prophets (despite the traditions of scholarship of other Christian churches, the Arabs, and the Jews), see Robert I. Moore, *The First European Revolution, c. 970-1215* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 146-59.

[63] Garsoïan, *The Epic Histories*, Bk IV, ch. lv, pp. 173-76, 380-81. As Garsoïan

And in Western Asia in the seventh and eighth centuries, Jewish-Christian tension would not have been simply a matter of rival self-images. There was an upsurge of Christian hostility toward Jews, in part because Islam was considered to have been Jewish-inspired and because the Muslim conquests, perhaps with some truth, were attributed partly to Jewish participation. Local Christians could not, however, deal with their Jews as contemporary Byzantium or Visigothic Spain could.[64] In Byzantium, for example, Judaizing was a crime, and Jews were under pressure to become Christian, whereas in places like Armenia, which were under Arab Muslim rule, Jews and Christians were on equal footing with each other. This is a period in which Jews took the opportunity to go on the offensive, producing a number of anti-Christian tracts.[65] In this general context, the Jewish descent of the Bagratunis seems like a neat way out of these ideological minefields.

Movses Khorenatsi extends the privilege of Jewish ancestry to the Amatunis. He reports two versions of their origins: that their family was an ancient Iranian one, a claim that Toumanoff takes to be correct,

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notes, the exact "figures given in BP for the number of deported Jewish families, as for the Armenian ones, are patently fantastic; nevertheless, they show almost invariably that the Jews composed the majority of the early Armenian urban population." The assertions in the text that everyone was deported and the cities demolished should likewise be taken to indicate severity of treatment rather than total destruction.

[64] Jews were treated much more harshly in later medieval Western Europe and possibly in Visigothic Spain than they were in Byzantium, where they only had an inferior legal status and paid extra taxation. See Joshua Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641-1204* (Athens: Verlag der Byzantinisch-Neugriechischen Jahrbücher, 1939), pp. 11-12, 18-23; Andrew Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) pp. 61-67, 189-200. See also Averil Cameron, "Byzantines and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996): 249-74. The emperor Heraclius in the 630s decreed a forced conversion. A century later, Leo III did the same in 721 or 722 but probably no longer after 726. See Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry*, pp. 47-57, 61-67; Kenneth R. Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 28-29; Starr, *The Jews*, pp. 2-3. There has been debate about the true extent of persecution by the Visigothic regime in Spain, but it seems to have spent 98 years (613-711) following the decree of King Sisebut that Jews be forcibly baptized in continuing to attack Judaism. Stow, *Alienated Minority*, pp. 47-54, discusses the problems and differing interpretations of this policy. See also Bernard Bachrach "A Reassessment of Visigothic Jewish Policy," *American Historical Review* 78 (1973): 11-54.

[65] Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), pp. 538-40.

and that they were descended from Manue, the father of Samson. It is this latter version that Movses prefers.[66] Toumanoff's explanation of the story of Manue is that Movses was confusing some ancient names, putting two and two together and making five. Acceptance of this interpretation involves no speculation about Amatuni traditions as a factor in Movses' account.[67] A different explanation suggested by Jacob Neusner, however, is that the Amatunis were indeed of Jewish descent, that they were descendants of the royal and Jewish house of the ancient kingdom of Adiabene.[68] This interpretation would allow the possibility that Movses was actually drawing on Amatuni traditions when he wrote about their origins.

There must surely have been some Amatuni traditions, for the Amatunis were a family distinguished in Armenian history. Ranked among the greatest of the nobles in the fourth century, they were demoted to the lesser ranks in the fifth, having offended the Persian king. They held the office of *hazarapet* (including possibly supervision of the peasantry) in the fifth century.[69] They participated honorably in the mid-fifth-century rebellion (led by Vardan Mamikonian) against Persia. Vahan Amatuni was one of the princes who, after being summoned to and imprisoned in Persia, feigned apostasy in order to return home only to rebel (though a lesser Amatuni noble was on the side of the sincere apostate Vasak of Siunik). Arandzar Amatuni, a junior noble, threw back marauding Persian forces to the joy of the Armenian army. Both, with a third, Arnak, were among the "princes by birth" and "citizens of heaven by spiritual virtue" who subsequently "gave themselves up to holy bonds, and torture,"[70] that is, to imprisonment for the sake of their faith. Amatuni nobles were active, in association with the Artsruni princes, in the failed 774-75 rebellion,[71] which is why they lost most of

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[66] Movses Khorenatsi, *History*, Bk II, ch. 57; Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i*, pp. 199-200.

[67] Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 198n223.

[68] Jacob Neusner, "The Conversion of Adiabene to Christianity," *Numen* 13 (1966): 144-50.

[69] Garsoïan, *The Epic Histories*, pp. 346-47, 531.

[70] Eghishe, *Vasn Vardanay ev Hayots Paterazmin* [On Vardan and the Armenian War], ed. Ervand Ter-Minasian (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1957; also Classical Armenian Text Reprint Series, ed. John Greppin [Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1993]), Bk I, ch. 22; trans. and comm., Robert W. Thomson, *Elishē. History of Vardan and the Armenian War* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 94-102, 144, 158, 237-38.

[71] Ghevond, *History*, ch. 34 = Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, pp. 133-34.

their domains in the north to the Arabs and presumably why in the 780s they contemplated and decided upon migration.

If the Amatunis were in the 780s cognizant of and developing a tradition that they were descended from Manue, this would have been ideologically and psychologically useful to them in their exodus. For Manue's wife, according to the Bible, was told by an angel that her forthcoming child, Samson, would begin to liberate Israel from the Philistines (Israel having been delivered to the Philistines as punishment for evildoing).[72]

Amatuni claims in the 790s to the status of Samson, Moses, and Joshua must have been embarrassing to the Bagratunis, the most eminent of the non-migrants, the "Gibeonites." They must also have revealed and emphasized an ideological weakness in the position of those Bagratunis who were then establishing themselves in Iberia, east-northeast of the new Amatuni settlement. And the Bagratunis might well have wondered what might come of that new Amatuni settlement, given that it had Byzantine imperial support. The implications of the biblical parallels were not auspicious for the Bagratunis. In the Bible, the Gibeonites (the Bagratuni equivalent) have to appeal to Joshua (Hamam Amatuni's equivalent) for help against five kings, and thereby provide the opportunity for him to demonstrate his power by successfully commanding sun and moon to stand still.

That the Amatunis in exile were indeed a power to be reckoned with is suggested by Edwards' interpretation of the mixed-up tale recounted in the *History of Taron* by Hovhannes Mamikonian. If Edwards is right, it seems that early in the ninth century the Georgians to the east of Hamshen were concerned about Amatuni power and independence, tried to destroy it, but failed. The prince of Hamshen is a dominant figure in this tale, involved in politics at the very highest level. In view of the fact that the Amatunis were an embarrassment to the Bagratunis in the 790s, Movses Khorenatsi's choice not only to record but also to endorse the Amatuni-Samson link points towards a date for his *History of the Armenians* of before 790. Several scholars have deduced a date that is before the end of the eighth century from his failure to assert that the Bagratunis were descended from the Old Testament King David.[73]

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[72] Judges, ch. 13, verses 1-5.

[73] Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 334; Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i*, p. 59.

This particular Bagratuni claim is first reported in a Georgian history which scholars date to about 800. The claim is mentioned with reference to Adarnase, or Ashot, the nephew of that Ashot who had been blinded for deserting the 747 rebellion. It was Adarnase's son, also called Ashot, who became prince of Iberia in 813 and his claim to Davidic descent was emphasized in stone during his lifetime.[74] There is a sculptured relief from the Georgian church of Opiza, which traditionally has been regarded as contemporary with Ashot, depicting him as a patron of the church. This interpretation is still convincing, despite a recent re-dating. If the traditional date is correct, then this relief portrays David acting as intercessor for Ashot with Christ and in this portrayal is alluding to the Davidic claim of the Bagratunis.[75] In the tenth century, this claim entered mainstream historical tradition, being reported by the Armenian historian Hovhannes Catholicos and known to the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus.[76]

The dates of these allusions to the Bagratuni claim to Davidic descent suggest that the claim itself was first made very late in the eighth century. It fits into the claim of Jewish descent, which had been made for them by Movses Khorenatsi. But it was nevertheless a novel and somewhat bold assertion. Something must have provoked it and made it seem desirable, even necessary. It seems likely that the stimulus was the particular context of the Amatuni migration, the Davidic claim being an assertion and insurance of Bagratuni superiority in prestige over other Armenian families. The Amatunis could be warrior leaders, but the Bagratunis would be kings.

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[74] Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 328, 353 and n4; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, p. 248 (the reference is from Juansher, *The History of King Vaxtang Gorgasali*).

[75] Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 328. The reasons for re-dating the relief to 923-937 are summarized by Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), pp. 222-24. If it is a tenth-century relief, it depicts a later Ashot, namely Ashot IV, son of the first Bagratuni king of Georgia with this Ashot's elder brother, King David, and commemorates remodeling of the church. The depiction of David is, however, curious if David is Ashot's brother. It would make more sense if this David is Ashot's ancestor. This is because David appears on the same side of the relief as Christ, rather than with Ashot. The pairing suggests that the two men, David and Ashot, were perceived as being on different planes.

[76] Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 329; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i*, p. 73; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, Greek text, ed. Gy. Moravcsik and Engl. trans. Romilly J.H. Jenkins (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), ch. 45, lines 1-12 (pp. 204-05).

Conclusion

The reading presented here of Ghevond's account of the Amatuni migration and of Movses Khorenatsi's assertions about the Jewish descent of two Armenian families leads to four conclusions. First, that Ghevond and his audience not only perceived Shapuh and Hamam Amatuni as being related to, and as emulating, Samson, who had begun the delivery of the Israelites from the Philistines, but they also perceived these two Amatunis and their followers as a new Moses and a new Joshua, and as a new people of Israel following them to a new promised land. Second, that the migrants shared these interpretations and drew on them to boost their morale and cohesion. Third, that the new Amatuni settlement and its ideological and psychological strength were an embarrassment and a potential threat to the Bagratunis. Fourth, that the Bagratunis responded to the challenge posed by the Amatunis by revising their own ancient genealogy. The contribution of the foundation of Hamshen to Armenian history was thus twofold: directly, the establishment of a community remarkable in itself, and, indirectly, the establishment of a powerful and enduring Bagratuni royal descent myth.